

Senator Tsongas on Southern Africa

With his two years experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Ethiopia, Senator Paul Tsongas of Massachusetts has a long-standing interest in African issues. On a recent Africa trip from December 28 to January 11, Sen. Tsongas stopped in Rhodesia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Angola and Nigeria, as well as South Africa. Then, in a letter to President Carter, he called on the US to give South Africa six months to show its willingness to dismantle apartheid, and he also pressed for official recognition of Angola, economic assistance to the front-line states, greater British communication with the Patriotic Front and US aid in Rhodesian refugee resettlement. Last week AFRICA NEWS questioned the Senator further about his views on the situation in southern Africa. Excerpts from the interview:

How do you evaluate the changes made in South Africa itself to date?

I think the changes that have been made are really cosmetic at best. There have been a number of statements that have gotten great international acclaim. But long-term change is a completely different thing—it seems to me that there has to be an acceptance of the inevitability of black majority rule, and [acceptance] that the separate development policy is intellectually bankrupt and cannot be sustained.

What about your six-month deadline suggestion?

The six months give us, one, the session of Parliament which will show in very concrete terms what it is they are prepared to do. And, secondly, Namibia should be resolved in that time period, and, if it is not resolved, we'll know why. And, thirdly, we can look perhaps at smaller policies such as passport controls, that kind of thing.

There's no question that six months from now we'll have a very good idea whether South Africa is simply doing what's necessary to stave off public opinion for a while or whether they have indeed abandoned apartheid and are moving—however one may argue the pace—towards majority rule. I don't think it's that difficult to make a determination.

If there has not been responsiveness, what particular measures do you think the US should take?

If you have intransigence on the part of

the South Africans in the case of Namibia, then clearly we have the UN mandate that we should pursue, and our allies, I would hope, would be equally committed to that process.

Beyond that it's my analysis that the pulse of South Africa really is economic and that US corporations should be convinced both by the president and by the Congress to push very serious changes, and in the absence of that change should be prepared to get out. I think that until the South Africans really believe that it is in their interest to change, that the change will be simply a surface change.

In the present political climate, isn't US policy likely to move the other way, towards US cooperation with South Africa, as in financing Savimbi in Angola, for example?

Well, it really is hard to understand where we are going. In a presidential year, obviously, whoever ends up in the White House will have a lot to say about what kind of policy we will advocate. But I would think we would eventually see, both in terms of South Africa and in terms of

Angola, a certain amount of realism creep into our policy, and I'm hopeful that that would happen sooner rather than later, and not as a result of the violence which at this point, I think, is inevitable in South Africa.

Your position would involve strengthening relations with all the front-line states, including Angola?

Oh, yes. The non-recognition of Angola is just as insane as non-recognition of China. Now that we are sidling up to China as an ally against the Soviets, the bankruptcy of our policy is all the more arguable.

[Moreover] I do believe many of the front-line states are reassessing their commitment, not so much in public statements as in private, towards socialism—at least as practiced in some countries—as a viable economic system. My own view is that there has to be some kind of private incentive solution, and given the long-term economic problems, I think forces are at work in this direction that are very favorable to the United States. My deep regret is that we don't seem to recognize this, that we always seem to react to problems rather than anticipate them.

Africa News □

US Senator Paul Tsongas with Samora Machel, president of Mozambique

